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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 000128

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SENV](#) [PBTS](#) [ECON](#) [NI](#) [CITES](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: A THRIVING MARKET IN IVORY

Classified By: Consul General Robyn Hinson-Jones for reasons 1.5B and D

11. (C) EST&H officer met on December 16 with a reluctant Deputy Director of Environment and Conservation, M. M. Omar (Protect) to discuss illegal trade in ivory in Nigeria as reported in a December 15, 2003 BBC article entitled, "West Africa's Ivory Trade Thrives". According to Deputy Director Omar (a former IV grantee), Nigeria's air and seaports once had several regulatory agencies in place to monitor illegal exports of ivory. Now, however, the agents have been removed because higher authorities reportedly found that air passengers had to traverse too many checkpoints and sometimes missed their flights. He stated that a new law, currently under review, will add penalties and other features not addressed in the current law, and should go a long way toward reducing the illegal trade in ivory.

12. (C) The Deputy Director thought controlling ivory entering Nigeria from abroad was key. He did not rule out illegal ivory finds in Nigeria nor would he name suspected cities where it is sold saying only that most of the tusks were not Nigerian. However, a December 2003 report by the NGO, Traffic, stated that 40% of the illegal trade occurs in Lagos with other major markets in Abuja, Kaduna, and Kano and to a lesser extent in Benin City, Onitsha and Port Harcourt. An informal survey by EST & H officer of two markets in Lagos showed merchants openly displaying and selling ivory. Ivory is reportedly a favorite commodity of diplomats and others from America, China, Italy, Japan and Korea according to Traffic. Further, Chinese and Lebanese buy processed and raw ivory in bulk for shipment out of Nigeria. Omar stated that Nigeria has many more than the 543 elephants the BBC said are living in its' national parks, but the exact number is unknown. According to Traffic, Nigeria has 478 elephants in the definite category, 340 in the possible category with another 300 in the speculative category.

13. (C) Capacity building inside Nigeria and at the ports of entry is taking place, but Omar commented that the Ministry should move slowly to ensure that personnel are not only well trained but also honest and committed to their jobs. Environment classes are now part of Nigeria's university curricula and there is a School of Wildlife, so there is a considerable pool of unused but trained manpower. The Ministry of Environment is working with conservation groups and other partners on building capacity and writing the new conservation law.

14. (C) Although he wanted to be more forthcoming, the Deputy Director stated that all information of a political nature involving the ivory trade must come from the Minister of the Environment or Permanent Secretary, and that as a civil servant, he could only address technical issues. During an interruption in the meeting, Omar was told that he had another "international visitor" waiting. He said he hoped it was not another call about the ivory trade because the issue has attracted added urgency since the above mentioned BBC news report.

15. (U) Background: Nigeria became a party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in 1975. It enforces the Convention through its domestic Endangered Species Decree 11/1985 (now an act of the National Assembly), which addresses the issuance of import, export, re-export permits and certificates involving the trade and/or traffic in wild animals, plants and products. One of the major obstacles to enforcement of the current and future law is the lack of coordination between implementing agencies. According to the Traffic report, between 1989 and 2003 Nigeria was connected to 400 illegal seizures worldwide. Based on its past problems, Nigeria must show compliance with Resolution Conf. 10.10 (Rev.) by March 2004 or risk the suspension of trade in CITES listed species in and out of Nigeria.

HINSON-JONES